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C O N F I D E N T I A L PESHAWAR 000080

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SUBJECT: ICRC COMMENTS ON NWFP AND FATA

REF: Peshawar 73

CLASSIFIED BY: Lynne Tracy, Principal Officer, U.S. Consulate
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REASON: 1.4 (d)

Summary -----

11. (C) Principal Officer met on April 23 with Benno Kocher, International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) Head of Sub-Delegation. In Swat, Kocher said that IDP camps are "empty," and ICRC is re-orienting its focus to basic services such as health. Numbers in the IDP camps in lower Dir are holding steady since most of the residents are from the Charmang valley where military operations are continuing. ICRC expressed interest in following IDPs back to Bajaur to implement rehabilitation assistance. Kocher feared that developments in Buner could focus government attention away from Hangu where the situation remains tense after an April 18 suicide attack killed over 27 security personnel. End Summary.

Buner and Swat -----

12. (C) Kocher told PO that ICRC has no presence in Buner. However, ICRC staff, he said, were able to move freely around the Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) strongholds of Matta and Khwazakhela (approximately 30 km north of Mingora) because of negotiated access with local militants. (Note: One of ICRC's key bargaining chips with militants has been medical treatment of wounded fighters -- an arrangement that dates back to spring of 2003 when an ICRC expat worker was murdered in southern Afghanistan.) ICRC, Kocher said, is beginning to re-orient its activities in Swat. IDP camps inside Swat are "empty," so ICRC is shifting its focus from relief (shelter and food) to basic services such as health.

Dir and Bajaur -----

13. (C) PO briefed Kocher on the Consulate's recent visit to Bajaur (reftel). Kocher commented that ICRC also visited Bajaur o/a April 20 to assess conditions since ICRC is working in the IDP camps in Lower Dir. Most of the IDPs in Lower Dir, he said, were from the Charmang valley where Frontier Corps is still carrying out operations. If IDPs in Lower Dir begin to return home, ICRC is interested in following to implement rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance.

14. (C) PO asked about the government's estimate that over 200,000 Bajaur IDPs had returned. Kocher agreed that IDPs are returning, but he viewed the government's numbers as high. Those in the camps, he said, are advocating for return packages to be delivered there rather than on arrival in Bajaur. (Note: The FATA Secretariat has told the Consulate that return relief should be provided inside Bajaur.)

Hangu

15. (C) Kocher expressed concern that events in Buner would shift attention away from Hangu and the deteriorating situation there. ICRC has been supporting basic health activities in Hangu and Bannu for a number of years. (Note: Kocher's concern tracks with reports that we are getting from Hangu contacts who say that the atmosphere has grown increasingly tense since the April 18 suicide attack that killed over 27 security personnel and injured more than 50.)

Comment

16. (C) The capacity of the Bajaur political administration to execute assistance remains very weak. ICRC's interest in following IDPs back to Bajaur is an important additional capacity that may be needed to expedite and expand implementation of relief and rehabilitation inside Bajaur.

TRACY